

# COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

## 23rd Dec 2021

---

### **Happy Christmas to you all**

- Media Focus has created a hand-picked media record of the Covid-19 pandemic since April 2020.
- During the last two years we've sent more than 560 newsletters to subscribers summarising stories from around the world each day.
- We've done so in the teeth of a pandemic of deliberate lies and disinformation, at all times trying to hand subscribers accuracy, importance and solid research in every story.
- We will be around as long as the pandemic is. Highlighting the most accurate reporting, helping those on the frontline of healthcare communication.
- We want to build out this news capture tool even further next year. Looking for partners, innovators with ideas and would be investors.
- We wish you all a Happy Christmas and a successful New Year.

To get in touch: [admin@nfind.uk](mailto:admin@nfind.uk)

### **Lockdown Exit**

---

#### **WHO boss: western countries' Covid booster drives likely to prolong pandemic**

The world will have enough doses of Covid vaccines early next year to inoculate all of the global adult population – if western countries do not hoard those vaccines to use in blanket booster programmes, the head of the World Health Organization (WHO) has said. Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on Wednesday there would be sufficient vaccine supplies in global circulation in the first quarter of 2022. “Blanket booster programmes are likely to prolong the Covid-19 pandemic, rather than ending it, by diverting supply to countries that already have high levels of vaccination coverage, giving the virus more opportunity to spread and mutate,” Tedros said, adding: “No country can boost its way out of the pandemic.” His remarks follow predictions by officials with the WHO's Africa region earlier this month that African countries should receive almost a billion doses within the same timeframe.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/dec/22/who-boss-covid-booster-drives-likely-prolong-pandemic>

#### **Some reduction in hospitalisation for Omicron v Delta in England: early analysis**

Estimates suggest Omicron cases are 15% less likely to attend hospital, and 40% less likely to be hospitalised for a night or more, compared to Delta. The researchers stress that these estimated reductions in severity must be balanced against the larger risk of infection with Omicron, due to the reduction in protection provided by both vaccination and natural infection. For example, at a population level, large numbers of infections could still lead to large numbers of hospitalisations. They say the estimates provided in this paper will assist in refining mathematical models of potential healthcare demand associated with the unfolding European Omicron wave.

<http://www.imperial.ac.uk/news/232882/some-reduction-hospitalisation-omicron-delta-england>

#### **Germany says FOURTH Covid shot needed to tackle Omicron as health minister backs vaccine mandate**

Germany has warned a fourth Covid vaccine will be needed to stop the spread of the contagious Omicron variant. Health minister Karl Lauterbach, who has thrown his support behind a vaccine

mandate, has ordered 80million doses of a Biontech vaccine which targets Omicron and should arrive in Germany by May. He has also ordered 4million doses of the newly approved vaccine Novavax - seen as more acceptable to vaccine sceptics - and 11million doses of the new Valneva shot, which is waiting for marketing authorisation.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10337035/Germany-says-FOURTH-Covid-shot-needed-tackle-Omicron-health-minister-backs-vaccine-mandate.html>

### **UK Covid cases soar by record 106,122 in biggest EVER increase since pandemic began**

UK Covid cases have soared by 106,122 in the biggest ever increase since the beginning of the pandemic. A further 140 deaths have also been reported over the past 24 hours. Last Wednesday 78,610 cases were reported - meaning there has been a 30% increase over the last seven days. It comes as cases of the new Omicron variant also continue to rise across the country. A total of 301 Covid-19 admissions were recorded by hospitals in London on December 20, NHS England said. This is up 78% week-on-week and the highest number for a single day since February 7.

<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/breaking-uk-covid-cases-soar-25766137>

### **Australian PM says no Christmas lockdown**

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison on Wednesday ruled out a Christmas lockdown, saying hospitals were coping well with a record surge in COVID-19 cases fuelled by the Omicron variant.

<https://www.reuters.com/video/watch/idOVF94JZ29>

### **COVID-19: More than 100,000 daily coronavirus cases reported in UK for first time in pandemic**

The UK has reported more than 100,000 daily COVID cases for the first time since of the start of the pandemic. Some 106,122 cases have been recorded in the latest 24-hour period - around 13,000 more than the previous high of 93,045 on 17 December. A further 140 coronavirus-related deaths have also been recorded. The figures compare with 90,629 cases and 172 fatalities reported on Tuesday.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-more-than-100000-daily-coronavirus-cases-reported-in-uk-for-first-time-in-pandemic-12502239>

### **Israel to Offer Fourth Covid-19 Shot to Over 60s**

Israel is set to offer a fourth dose of the Covid-19 vaccine to older people and healthcare workers to reduce the impact of an expected surge of infections driven by the Omicron variant—as two major studies found that the variant causes significantly less serious disease than earlier strains. Researchers at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland concluded that the risk of hospitalization with Omicron was two-thirds lower than with earlier variants. South African researchers said earlier on Wednesday that they estimate the risk of hospitalization at around 70% to 80% lower.

<https://images.wsj.net/im-456643?width=860&size=1.5>

### **Omicron's march revives urgent global calls for vaccinations**

Australia's political leaders were set to hold an emergency meeting on Wednesday as cases of the Omicron coronavirus variant broke infection records and forced countries around to world to double down on vaccinations, just days before Christmas. Authorities globally have imposed new restrictions and stepped up inoculation efforts as Omicron emerges as the dominant strain of the virus, upending imminent reopening plans that many governments hoped would herald the start of a post-pandemic era in 2022.

<https://thehimalayantimes.com/covid-19/omicrons-march-revives-urgent-global-calls-for-vaccinations>

### **With warning for unvaccinated, Biden lays out plan to fight surging Omicron**

U.S. President Joe Biden announced on Tuesday more federal vaccination and testing sites to tackle a surge in COVID-19 driven by the Omicron variant, and said 500 million free at-home rapid tests will

be available to Americans starting in January. Biden offered both a warning to the unvaccinated, who he said have "good reason to be concerned," and reassurance that those who are inoculated can gather for the holidays despite the new variant sweeping the country.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/omicron-surges-biden-expand-testing-warn-unvaccinated-2021-12-21/>

### **U.K. on Edge Heading Into Christmas Overshadowed by Omicron**

Boris Johnson has given Britons the Christmas he has long promised -- some light-touch pandemic restrictions but with no limits on family gatherings. The big question is over what comes next. When the U.K. prime minister ruled out tighter restrictions in the coming days, he also urged Britons to be cautious and warned tougher curbs may yet be needed after Dec. 25 if an omicron-fueled wave of Covid-19 infections threatens to overwhelm the National Health Service.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-22/u-k-heads-into-christmas-uncertain-about-covid-rules-afterward?srnd=premium-europe>

## **Exit Strategies**

---

### **Covid-19: In Sweden, a vaccine passport on a microchip implant**

At the beginning of December, Sweden enacted new rules requiring individuals to have a passport at all events with more than 100 people. Following that announcement, the number of people who got microchips inserted under their skin rose: around 6,000 people in Sweden have so far had a chip inserted in their hands.

<https://www.france24.com/en/video/20211221-covid-19-in-sweden-a-vaccine-passport-on-a-microchip-implant>

### **Philippines halves COVID-19 booster wait time to three months**

The Philippines has halved to three months the waiting time for a booster dose of COVID-19 vaccine in its battle to rein in the more infectious Omicron variant of coronavirus, which has forced a global tightening of curbs. The Southeast Asian nation joins Britain, Germany, South Korea and Thailand among a growing list of countries cutting the interval for boosters as they try to stave off a new surge in infections. From Wednesday, adults can receive a booster dose at least three months after taking the second complement of a two-dose vaccine, versus six months earlier, acting presidential spokesperson Karlo Nograles said. Single-dose vaccine recipients are eligible for a booster after two months, he told a regular news conference

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/philippines-cuts-covid-19-booster-shot-interval-three-months-2021-12-21/>

### **Finland starts vaccinating children aged 5-11 against COVID**

Finland will from Thursday start offering COVID-19 vaccines to children between 5-11 years of age, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health said on Wednesday. The Finnish Health Institute earlier this month recommended that children aged five and over should be vaccinated against COVID-19 if they or someone in their household were at high risk of severe infection

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/finland-starts-vaccinating-children-aged-5-11-against-covid-2021-12-22/>

### **Slovakia to ship 200000 COVID-19 shots to Omicron-hit Denmark**

Slovakia will supply 200,000 Pfizer/BioNTech coronavirus vaccines to fellow EU member Denmark in January to help its booster campaign as infections from the fast-spreading Omicron variant soar, the Slovak Health Ministry said on Wednesday. A ministry document discussed by the government said Denmark had asked for vaccines to be supplied without delay. "With regard to data and the speed of vaccinations in Slovakia as well as the amount in storage, the Slovak Republic is able to provide Denmark 200,000 doses in January," it said.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/slovakia-ship-200000-covid-19-shots-omicron-hit-denmark-2021-12-22/>

### **French rush for COVID tests before Christmas reunions**

Student Jules de Biase is fully vaccinated and has no COVID-19 symptoms, but on Wednesday, ahead of seeing his elderly grandmother over the Christmas holidays, he took a test to be certain he

was well. "It's better to be sure you're negative," he said. Many others agree, as the Omicron variant spreads rapidly across France and the rest of western Europe in the run-up to the festive period. Laura Korniak, a 29-year-old communications specialist, said she was also getting tested as a precaution. "I wanted to test before joining my family to celebrate Christmas," she said. COVID PCR and antigen tests are free for people in the French social security system and vaccinated. For others, the tests are some of the cheapest in Europe, with an antigen test typically costing about 25 euros (\$28.27) and a PCR costing less than 50 euros.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/french-rush-covid-tests-before-christmas-reunions-2021-12-22/>

### **Israel to offer fourth COVID-19 vaccine dose in bid to outpace Omicron**

Israel is to offer a fourth dose of a COVID-19 vaccine to people older than 60 or with compromised immune systems, and to health workers, as part of a drive to ramp up the shots and outpace the spread of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus. A Health Ministry expert panel - whose findings have yet to be implemented - recommended on Tuesday that those eligible should receive the fourth shot at least four months after receiving their third. Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, who has sought to drum up higher Israeli turnout for vaccines, welcomed the panel's statement as "great news that will help us overcome the Omicron wave that is spreading around the world".

<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israel-offer-fourth-dose-covid-19-vaccine-people-over-60-2021-12-21/>

### **Denmark cuts COVID-19 booster shot interval for people aged 18 to 39**

Denmark will reduce the gap between second and third COVID-19 vaccinations for people aged 18 to 39 to 4-1/2 months, down from the six months initially planned, health minister Magnus Heunicke said on Wednesday. The Nordic country, which has seen record high new coronavirus cases this week, will also require a negative test for people arriving from abroad, the minister said.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/denmark-cuts-covid-19-booster-shot-interval-people-aged-18-39-2021-12-22/>

### **Britain to vaccinate vulnerable younger children against COVID-19**

Britain on Wednesday said it would start vaccinating vulnerable children aged five to 11 against COVID-19 after the country's medicines regulator approved the use of a lower dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech shot in that age group. The children will receive two 10-microgram doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine - a third of the adult dose - with an interval of eight weeks between the first and second doses, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) said. A decision on whether to offer vaccination in general to younger children would be taken after additional data on the rapidly spreading Omicron variant and the effect of immunising young children could be considered, the JCVI said.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britain-approves-pfizer-biontech-shot-younger-children-2021-12-22/>

### **'A massive loss': two of the 18,000 UK Covid victims since 'freedom day'**

Her death is among thousands that have taken place since so-called freedom day on 19 July. In the summer, the public awaited what had been billed as a return to normality after more than a year of coronavirus restrictions. Nightclubs reopened as restrictions on large events and social distancing ended. Since then, more than 18,000 people have died from coronavirus and behind those numbers are losses that have left gaping holes in families. Murray was never worried about getting seriously unwell with Covid, Leighanne says. Her aunt was very healthy and although she had asthma she was a vegan who was a keen crossfit fan, she adds. The 53-year-old believed if she did succumb her symptoms would be mild. Leighanne also wants to make it clear that her aunt was not a "crazy anti-vaxxer" and had a history working in clinical trials. She says her aunt wanted more information about the long-term effects.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/dec/22/massive-loss-two-of-18000-uk-covid-victims-since-freedom-day>

### **Biden calls on Americans to vaccinate to fight Omicron as Europe braces for 'storm'**

Countries across Europe considered new curbs on movement on Tuesday while U.S. President Joe

Biden appealed to all Americans to get vaccinated to fight the Omicron variant sweeping the world days before the second Christmas of the pandemic. Omicron infections are multiplying across Europe, the United States and Asia, including in Japan, where a single cluster of COVID-19 cases at a military base has grown to at least 180. "If you're not fully vaccinated, you have good reason to be concerned," Biden said at the White House, where he unveiled plans to buy 500 million rapid COVID-19 tests to be distributed for free to Americans who request them starting in January.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/omicrons-global-spread-prompts-renewed-lockdowns-delayed-reopenings-2021-12-21/>

### **Omicron Spread Prompts More Interest in Booster Shots Than New Vaccinations**

A recent rise in Covid-19 cases driven by the Omicron variant is prompting more vaccinated Americans to consider getting booster shots, but it doesn't appear to be persuading large numbers of the unvaccinated, survey data shows. Among vaccinated adults who haven't had a booster shot, 54% are more likely to do so because of Omicron, according to a survey released by the Kaiser Family Foundation Tuesday. Of unvaccinated respondents, 12% said the fast-spreading variant's emergence would make them more inclined to get their first shot. The U.S. has recently been adding about 1.6 million new vaccine shots a day, up from about 1.4 million before Thanksgiving, according to data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The recent doses include boosters and recently eligible children under 12, making it difficult to discern the reasons people are getting shots.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/omicron-spread-prompts-more-interest-in-booster-shots-than-new-vaccinations-11640169006>

### **Cloth Masks May Not Be Enough in Omicron Fight, Expert Says**

Omicron is once again making people think twice before reaching out for their colorful, reusable cloth face masks. "They can be really good or really terrible," depending on what fabric is used, said Trish Greenhalgh, professor of primary health care services at the University of Oxford. Double or triple-layer masks made of a mix of materials can be more effective, but most cloth coverings are just "fashion accessories," according to Greenhalgh. As the highly infectious omicron causes Covid infections to surge worldwide, governments around the world are tightening restrictions to try and stop its spread. Earlier this month Britain reintroduced compulsory mask wearing on public transport, shops and in some indoor venues, having previously relaxed the rules in the summer.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-22/cloth-masks-may-not-be-enough-in-omicron-fight-expert-says>

### **Singapore to freeze new ticket sales for quarantine-free arrivals**

Singapore will freeze the sale of tickets for arriving flights and buses under its quarantine-free travel programme for four weeks from Thursday, the government said, citing the risk from the fast-spreading Omicron COVID-19 variant. Under the vaccinated travel lane (VTL) programme, Singapore allows quarantine-free entry for fully vaccinated travellers arriving from certain countries on designated flights or buses. The travellers have to undergo regular testing. About two dozen countries are listed in the programme including Australia, India, Malaysia, Britain and the United States.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/singapore-freeze-new-ticket-sales-quarantine-free-travel-2021-12-22/>

## **Partisan Exits**

---

### **S.Korean businesses protest against return of strict COVID rules**

Some 300 South Korean small business owners protested in Seoul on Wednesday over the return of strict social distancing rules, urging the government to compensate them for financial losses and scrap its "vaccine pass" policy. South Korea restored tough distancing curbs this week after easing them in November, as new infections and serious cases continue to make new records and stretch medical services, despite a vaccination rate of over 92%. The measures, effective until Jan. 2,

include a 9 p.m. dining curfew and a ban on gatherings of more than four people, who have to be fully vaccinated. Unvaccinated people can only eat out alone, or should use takeout or delivery options.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/skorean-businesses-protest-against-return-strict-covid-rules-2021-12-22/>

### **Australian PM says no Xmas lockdown as hospitals coping with rising Omicron**

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison on Wednesday ruled out a Christmas lockdown, saying hospitals were coping well with a record surge in COVID-19 cases fuelled by the Omicron variant. Australia is grappling with the more transmissible Omicron variant of the coronavirus as restrictions ease ahead of the Christmas holidays after higher vaccination levels were reached. "Despite these rising cases, hospitals and health systems remain in a strong position but of course they will be tested," Morrison told reporters in Canberra after an emergency Cabinet meeting.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/australias-national-cabinet-meet-early-amid-omicron-surge-2021-12-21/>

## **Scientific Viewpoint**

---

### **Army to announce it has developed a single vaccine that protects from ALL variants of COVID and SARS**

Walter Reed Army Institute of Research is set to announce the development of a vaccine that is effective against all COVID and SARS variants. Army researchers at Walter Reed have been working on a vaccine for two years. The Spike Ferritin Nanoparticle COVID-19 vaccine (SpFN) has so far been proven to protect against all existing and potential variants of the viruses. The Omicron COVID variant has been quickly spreading across the world and now accounts for 73 per cent of all new diagnoses in the US. Some states including New York and neighboring New Jersey say the super-infectious variant is behind 90 per cent of positive cases there

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10335105/Army-announce-developed-single-vaccine-protects-variants-COVID-SARS.html>

### **Omicron COVID symptoms milder than Delta in UK, early data suggests**

Britons who fall ill with the Omicron variant of the coronavirus are less likely to become severely sick than those who contract Delta, U.K. government scientists are set to say in early real-world data on the severity of the disease. But while Omicron cases in the U.K. seem milder overall, the U.K. Health Security Agency (UKHSA) has found it is not necessarily mild enough to avoid large numbers of hospitalizations, according to the data, which is due to be published before Christmas and was previewed by POLITICO's London Playbook. The UKHSA found evidence that for those who do become severely ill with Omicron, there is still a high chance of hospitalization and death. The scientists also confirmed that the transmissibility of Omicron is very high, meaning that even though it is milder, infections could rocket to the point large numbers could still end up in hospital. The UKHSA is also expected to conclude that while two doses of a COVID vaccine are not enough to offer strong protection against Omicron, a booster dose does significantly reduce the chance of both symptomatic infection and hospitalization, London Playbook reported. A UKHSA spokesperson said they would not comment on unpublished data.

<https://www.politico.eu/article/omicron-variant-coronavirus-symptoms-milder-delta-uk-data/>

### **Pfizer to provide 2.5 mln additional doses of its COVID-19 pill to UK**

Pfizer Inc said on Wednesday it will provide an additional 2.5 million doses of its COVID-19 pill Paxlovid to the United Kingdom. A total of 2.75 million doses of the pill are expected to be delivered to the UK through 2022, the drugmaker said.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/pfizer-provide-25-mln-additional-doses-its-covid-19-pill-uk-2021-12-22/>

### **France cancels order for Merck's COVID-19 antiviral drug**

France has cancelled its order for Merck & Co's COVID-19 antiviral drug following disappointing trial data and hopes instead to receive Pfizer's competing drug before the end of January, the health minister said on Wednesday. France is the first country to publicly say it has cancelled an order for the Merck treatment after the company released data in late November suggesting its drug was markedly less effective than previously thought, reducing hospitalisations and deaths in its clinical trial of high-risk individuals by about 30%. "The latest studies weren't good," Olivier Veran told BFM TV. A spokesperson for Merck said the country's planned purchase did not take place after the French health authority refused to authorise the pill earlier this month.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/france-cancels-order-mercks-covid-19-antiviral-drug-2021-12-22/>

### **Turkey's domestic COVID-19 vaccine receives emergency use authorisation -minister**

Turkey's domestically developed COVID-19 vaccine, Turkovac, has received emergency use authorisation by Turkish authorities and will be open to use from next weekend, Health Minister Fahrettin Koca said on Wednesday. Turkey began developing Turkovac this year, but the launch date for the vaccine has been beset by delays. President Tayyip Erdogan has said Turkey would make the shot available globally.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/turkeys-domestic-covid-19-vaccine-receives-emergency-use-authorisation-minister-2021-12-22/>

### **JCVI recommends Covid jabs for vulnerable children aged 5-11**

Hundreds of thousands of clinically vulnerable five- to 11-year-olds are to be offered Covid vaccines for the first time, with some scientists calling for the programme to be extended to the whole age group before the new UK school term. The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) has recommended vaccinations for about 330,000 younger children at clinical risk, and also those living with someone who is immunosuppressed. They will be offered two doses of the Pfizer vaccine – in 10-microgram amounts, a third of the quantity used for adults – with a gap of eight weeks. A parallel announcement will expand the booster programme to more teenagers, including 16 and 17-year-olds.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/dec/22/jcvi-set-to-recommend-vaccinating-vulnerable-five--to-11-year-olds>

### **U.K. Allows Pfizer Covid Shot for At-Risk Children Aged 5 to 11**

The U.K. vaccines panel cleared the Pfizer Inc. Covid-19 shot for use in vulnerable young children in a bid to widen vaccination coverage against the omicron variant. The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation changed its advice to allow at-risk children aged 5 to 11 years old to become eligible for two doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. Each inoculation will be one-third of the dose used for those aged 12 and above. Only children in a clinical risk group or who are a household contact of an immunosuppressed person are eligible for vaccination at this stage. The JCVI said it would issue advice on shots for less vulnerable children "in due course."

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-22/u-k-allows-pfizer-covid-shot-for-at-risk-children-aged-5-to-11>

### **France Scraps Order for Merck Antiviral Pill, Looks to Pfizer**

France canceled an order for Merck & Co.'s antiviral pill on disappointing test results and is now counting on a treatment from Pfizer Inc., according to the country's health minister. "We had to cancel because the last studies weren't good," Olivier Veran said Wednesday in an interview on BFM TV. "It cost us nothing." Pfizer's pill, Paxlovid, and Merck's molnupiravir are intended for higher-risk people who test positive for the coronavirus. Veran had initially expressed optimism about the Merck drug. The treatments, in which patients take pills at home over several days, could ease the burden on stretched hospitals as infections are soaring in the U.S. and Europe.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-22/france-scraps-order-for-merck-antiviral-pill-looks-to-pfizer>

### **Is It Safe to Fly Right Now? Omicron May Double Infection Risk on Planes: IATA**

Aircraft passengers are twice or even three times more likely to catch Covid-19 during a flight since the emergence of the omicron variant, according to the top medical adviser to the world's airlines. The new strain is highly transmissible and has become dominant in a matter of weeks, accounting for more than 70% of all new cases in the U.S. alone. While hospital-grade air filters on modern passenger jets make the risk of infection much lower on planes than in crowded places on the ground such as shopping malls, omicron is rapidly spreading just as more travelers take to the skies for year-end holidays and family reunions.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-22/omicron-at-least-doubles-risk-of-getting-infected-on-a-plane>

### **S.African study offers Omicron hope as nations reimpose curbs**

South African data offered a glimmer of hope on Wednesday about the severity of the Omicron coronavirus variant, but World Health Organization officials cautioned that it was too soon to draw firm conclusions as the strain spread across the globe. With the second Christmas of the pandemic days away, countries imposed new restrictions on their citizens while worrying about the damage the variant might inflict on their economies. Plans for Christmas parties and celebrations were wiped out from London to New Delhi amid the uncertainty.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/the-great-reboot/omicrons-march-revives-urgent-global-calls-vaccinations-2021-12-22/>

### **Pharma 2022 forecast: With omicron extending the pandemic, how will biopharma respond to COVID?**

Well, thanks to omicron, here we are again, asking many of the same questions and with renewed anxiety about the future. At least now we know the drill. "I see COVID continuing to have new variants and coming back each season," Cantor Fitzgerald's Grace Chen told Fierce Pharma. We also know what questions to ask. Is omicron more contagious? Will vaccines and treatments be effective? Are we destined for a return of restrictions and lockdowns? And, after omicron, what's next? Are we simply on a coronavirus hamster wheel, with many more variants yet to contend with? As the pharmaceutical industry approaches 2022, there is some comfort knowing that a blueprint is in place to respond to the pandemic—and one that will allow business to continue. But what about those best-laid plans based on the belief that the pandemic would transition into an endemic in 2022?

<https://www.fiercepharma.com/pharma/omicron-extending-pandemic-how-does-impact-biopharma-industry-planning-for-2022>

### **A computational biologist weighs in on Omicron, the future of vaccines, and the CDC's variant forecast**

What do the data so far tell us about Omicron and whether it causes milder disease than previous Covid-19 variants? What can we expect to see as Omicron infections crash up against the country's health care system? Why do Omicron waves seem to decline so quickly after scaling such heights? We don't know. So we asked Trevor Bedford, a computational biologist at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle, for his thoughts. Bedford believes that while there may be something intrinsically different about the way Omicron viruses attack human bodies, much of what is being reported in terms of mildness of cases can be explained by the fact that many people being infected have some immunity to the SARS-CoV-2 virus, either because they were previously infected or they've been vaccinated.

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/12/22/a-computational-biologist-weighs-in-on-omicron-the-future-of-vaccines-and-the-cdcs-variant-forecast/>

## **Coronavirus Resurgence**

---

### **Poland reports highest number of COVID-related deaths in fourth wave**

Poland reported 775 COVID-related deaths on Friday, the highest daily number in the fourth wave of

the coronavirus pandemic, the data from the health ministry showed. Poland has been dealing with persistently high daily case numbers in a fourth wave that has forced authorities to tighten restrictions. On Friday Poland reported 18,021 new coronavirus cases with the total number of infections since the start of the pandemic crossing 4 million. "Unfortunately, (deaths) dominate among the elderly and the unvaccinated... we do not get vaccinated and we go to hospitals too late," ministry's spokesman Wojciech Andrusiewicz told reporters

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/poland-reports-highest-number-covid-related-deaths-fourth-wave-2021-12-22/>

### **Northern Ireland COVID case numbers surge 50% to record high**

Northern Ireland ordered the closure of nightclubs from Sunday after reporting an all-time high of 3,231 COVID-19 cases on Wednesday, up from an average of just over 2,000 in the previous seven days due to the highly transmissible Omicron variant. The devolved government of the British region also ordered an end to ordering at bars and limited restaurants to serve no more than six people per table. But it stopped short of matching the 8 p.m. closure imposed on hospitality venues in the neighbouring Republic of Ireland last week

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/northern-ireland-covid-case-numbers-surge-50-record-high-2021-12-22/>

### **Portugal imposes post-Christmas COVID-19 curbs as Omicron cases surge**

Portugal on Tuesday ordered nightclubs and bars to close and told people to work from home for at least two weeks starting on Saturday to control the spread of COVID-19 over the holiday period. "This still isn't the normal Christmas we are used to," Prime Minister Antonio Costa told a news conference. "If we do not adopt these measures now, the consequences on everyone's lives will be much worse after Christmas and the New Year." Costa also announced capacity restrictions at stores and said a negative coronavirus test would now be required to stay at hotels or go to events.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/portugal-imposes-post-christmas-covid-19-curbs-omicron-cases-surge-2021-12-21/>

### **Austria tightens restrictions as it braces for Omicron wave**

Austria is introducing restrictions including a 10 p.m. closing time to slow the spread of the Omicron coronavirus variant after Christmas and prevent it being imported from Europe's hardest-hit countries, a senior health official said on Wednesday. Austria began emerging from its fourth full coronavirus lockdown 10 days ago. While that three-week lockdown slashed daily COVID-19 infections, the country is bracing for another surge because of the extremely contagious Omicron variant, of which several hundred cases have been confirmed so far.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/austria-restricting-arrivals-uk-denmark-netherlands-over-omicron-2021-12-22/>

### **Portugal to Record Almost 9,000 New Covid Cases, Minister Says**

Portugal on Wednesday recorded 8,937 new daily coronavirus infections, the highest level since February, as the government prepares to impose new restrictions to fight the pandemic. There were 11 fatalities in a day, taking the total to 18,823 deaths, Portugal's Directorate General of Health said in a statement. Despite the high case figure, the number of deaths "remains relatively controlled," Health Minister Marta Temido said in an interview with CNN Portugal television.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-22/portugal-to-record-almost-9-000-new-covid-cases-minister-says>

### **U.K. on Edge Heading Toward Christmas Overshadowed by Omicron**

Boris Johnson has given Britons the Christmas he has long promised -- some light-touch pandemic restrictions but with no limits on family gatherings. The big question is over what comes next. When the U.K. prime minister ruled out tighter restrictions in the coming days, he also urged Britons to be cautious and warned tougher curbs may yet be needed after Dec. 25 if an omicron-fueled wave of Covid-19 infections threatens to overwhelm the National Health Service.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-22/u-k-heads-into-christmas-uncertain-about-covid-rules-afterwar>

d

## **New Lockdown**

---

### **S.African study offers Omicron hope as nations reimpose curbs**

South African data offered a glimmer of hope on Wednesday about the severity of the Omicron coronavirus variant, but World Health Organization officials cautioned that it was too soon to draw firm conclusions as the strain spread across the globe. With the second Christmas of the pandemic days away, countries imposed new restrictions on their citizens while worrying about the damage the variant might inflict on their economies. Plans for Christmas parties and celebrations were wiped out from London to New Delhi amid the uncertainty.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/the-great-reboot/omicrons-march-revives-urgent-global-calls-vaccinations-2021-12-22/>

### **Despite consumption hit, China to stand fast on tough COVID-19 curbs**

China's strict COVID-19 policy is weighing on consumption and rattling foreign firms, but its effectiveness and the imperative to maintain stability heading into a sensitive year mean Beijing will stick to its approach, experts say. China has reported just two COVID-19 fatality this year, retaining a tough line even as many other countries ease restrictions, imposing targeted shutdowns and travel curbs even when they disrupted local economies. Avoiding major outbreaks is especially critical in a year when Beijing hosts both the Winter Olympic Games and the once-every-five-years Communist Party Congress, where President Xi Jinping is expected to clinch a third term as party secretary.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/despite-consumption-hit-china-poised-stand-fast-strict-covid-controls-2021-12-22/>

### **Chinese city Xian curbs residents' travel, activities amid COVID outbreak**

The Chinese city of Xian has ordered its 13 million residents to stay at home and urged them not to leave town unnecessarily as it struggles to contain rising COVID-19 cases under Beijing's guideline that flare-ups must be curbed as quickly as possible. Xian, in China's northwest, has reported more than 140 domestically transmitted infections with confirmed symptoms since Dec. 12 in its latest cluster caused by the Delta variant of the coronavirus. A handful of cities have detected cases linked to the Xian outbreak, including one from the capital Beijing.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/chinese-city-xian-curbs-residents-travel-activities-amid-covid-outbreak-2021-12-22/>

### **German health experts urge more COVID curbs as lockdown not ruled out**

German health experts said on Wednesday that new coronavirus curbs probably did not go far enough to keep the Omicron variant in check, as the country's health minister said he had not ruled out a full lockdown if cases spiked. The measures, decided on Tuesday, include limits on private gatherings, closing clubs and discos and banning spectators at football matches and are set to be introduced from Dec. 28. Janosch Dahmen, health expert for junior coalition partners the Greens, said they were a step in the right direction. "But they probably won't be able to curb the danger that Omicron represents," he told broadcaster Deutschlandfunk.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/german-health-experts-urge-more-covid-curbs-lockdown-not-ruled-out-2021-12-22/>